

# FOAFTale News

Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research

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**THE THIRTY-FIRST PERSPECTIVES ON  
CONTEMPORARY LEGEND CONFERENCE,  
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, U.S.A,  
MAY 28 – JUNE 1, 2013**

Sponsored by the University of Kentucky  
College of Arts and Sciences  
and the Department of Modern and Classical  
Languages, Literatures and Cultures

Organizer: Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, University of  
Kentucky, MCLLC (j.rouhier@uky.edu)

Assistants: Quaid Adams and Emily Richardson,  
University of Kentucky, Folklore and Mythology

## PROGRAM

All events, unless otherwise noted, take place in the meeting room in the basement of the Gratz Park Inn

### Tuesday, May 28, 2013

10:00– 12:00.           Registration  
12:00– 13:30           Lunch Break

### Session One:

#### The Supernatural in Legend and Film

*Chair:* Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby

13:30

*Elizabeth Tucker*, Ghosts Moving Furniture

14:00

*Mikel J. Koven*, Found-Footage Films and the Visual Rhetoric of the Legend Film

14:30

Coffee Break

15:00

*Linda Dégh*, The Importance of Fieldwork in Studying Legends

*Moderator:* Elizabeth Tucker

16:00

Depart hotel for Gaines Center Bingham- Davis House, 232 East Maxwell Street (25 minute walk)

16:30

Presentation by Doug Boyd, Kentucky Oral History Project, University of Kentucky, Gaines Center Bingham-Davis House, 232 East Maxwell Street

15:30

Opening Reception—Max Kade House, 212 East Maxwell Street

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### Wednesday, May 29, 2013

9:00 – 9:30

Registration

### Session Two:

#### Conspiracies in Legend

*Chair,* Carolyn E. Ware

9:30

*Jacob Affolter*, Birther Nonsense: Politics, Resentment, and Urban Folklore

10:00

*Aurore Van de Winkel*, DSK and the Conspiracy Theory

10:30

Coffee Break

11:00

*Patricia A. Turner, How Many Birthers Does It Take To Screw In A Light Bulb?: Obama Contemporary Legends and the 2012 Reelection*

11:45 – 13:30 Lunch Break

**Session Three:****Legend in Art and Literature**

*Chair, Yvonne Milspaw*

13:30

*Clint Jones, The Downfall of Camelot: Mimetic Violence and Le Morte d'Arthur*

14:00

*Carl Lindahl, Swift's Yahoo = Boone's Yeahoh = Bigfoot?*

14:30 Coffee Break

15:00

*David Wilke, Turning – Not Rattling – the Tables in Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House*

15:30

*Kristin McAndrews, Cultural Gastronomy and the Contemporary Legend: The Beauty and the Beast*

16:00 – 20:00 Free Time

20:00 Presentation by Patti Starr, owner of Ghost Hunters International, Lexington, KY

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**Thursday, May 30, 2013**

7:45 Meet in Hotel Lobby

8:00 Depart Gratz Park Inn

8:30 Breakfast at the Keeneland Racetrack Kitchen

9:30 Depart Keeneland Racetrack

10:15 Tour of Woodford Reserve Distillery

11:30 Depart Woodford Reserve

12:30 Lunch at Boone Tavern on the Berea College Campus

14:00 Free Time to explore Berea, the folk arts and crafts capital of Kentucky

16:00 Tour of the Hutchins Library (Berea College) Special Collections and Archive

17:00 Return to Lexington

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**Friday, May 31, 2013**

9:00 – 9:30 Registration

**Session Four:****Legends and the Internet**

*Chair, Ian Brodie*

9:30

*Joel Best and Kathleen A. Bogle, How People Evaluate Contemporary Legends: Online Discussions about Sex Bracelets and Rainbow Parties*

10:00

*Gail de Vos, Apps-olutely Folklore: Applications for the I-Generation*

10:30 Coffee Break

11:00

*Elissa Henken, The Price of Fame*

11:30

*Brendon Yarish, Building a Legend: The Skinny on Slenderman*

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch Break

**Session Five:****Legend, Authority, and Identity**

*Chair, Elissa R. Henken*

13:30

*Andrea Kitta, The HPV Vaccine: Protecting "Sluts", "Gays", and "Stupid People" since 2006*

14:00

*Jodi McDavid, The Monsignor "was a Very Scary Man": Personal Experience Narratives From Acadian-New Brunswick*

14:30 Coffee Break

15:00

*Yvonne Milspaw, Powwowing, Witchcraft, and Conflicting Systems of Authority in Pennsylvania German Legends*

15:30 – 17:00 Free Time

17:30 Depart Hotel for conference dinner at Holly Hill Inn, Midway, Kentucky

20:00 Performance by Reel World String Band

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**Saturday, June 1, 2013**

9:00 – 9:30 Registration

## ABSTRACTS

### Session Six:

#### Regional Legends

Chair, Carl Lindahl

9:30

*Daniel P. Compora*, Michigan Mutations

10:00

*Gregory Hansen*, Legends of Violence in Florida's History: Encountering the Legacy of Cracker Violence

10:30

Coffee Break

11:00

*John Laudun*, Locating Louisiana Legends at the Intersection(s) of Land and Water

11:30

*Fredericka Schmadel*, The Prankster, the Kobolds, and the Helpful Giant: Some Aspects of Camp Culture at a Southern Indiana Girl Scout Camp

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch Break

### Session Seven:

#### Ostension, Belief, and Time in Legend

Chair, Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby

13:30

*Ian Brodie*, Generations and the Perception of Time in Legend and Custom

14:00

*Ambrož Kvartič*, Legends ARE False: Popular Pseudo-Scientific Search for Truth Behind Legends

14:30

*Daniel Peretti*, The Bunk of Debunkers: Ostensive Action and Ambiguity in Stage Magic

15:00

Coffee Break

15:15 – 17:15

### ISCLR Annual Business Meeting

18:00 Depart hotel for Lexington Legends Baseball Game

*Jacob Affolter*, University of Kentucky, USA

#### “Birther Nonsense”: Politics, Resentment, and Urban Folklore

In recent years, a surprising number of people believed false allegations that President Obama was not born in the United States. The most obvious explanation for the widespread acceptance of this political urban legend is racism. This explanation is all the more plausible when we consider the fact that the president's opponent in the campaign, Sen. John McCain, was in fact born in the Panama Canal Zone.

In this paper, I will not dispute this explanation. Rather, I will argue that racism is a part of a network of political and cultural forces that made the “birther” allegations attractive to many Americans. To that end, I will explore two complementary explanations for the lamentable popularity of these false charges against the President.

First, I will examine the “birther” claims in the context of American political history. To that end, I will briefly discuss the history of attempts to discredit new Presidents and President-elect. Allegations that Presidents were born outside of the United States go back at least 150 years, and attempts to delegitimize new Presidents goes back even farther. In that sense, the “birther” allegations are a new variation on an old theme.

Second, I will argue that there are particular features of our current situation that made these particular accusations attractive to a significant number of people. Alongside racism, these stories tapped into several veins of political, cultural, and class resentment. These resentments make it tempting for a large number of citizens to believe the allegations. Moreover, the issue served the political elites of both parties, especially the Republican Party. The allegations made it possible for political elites to tap into powerful feelings of resentment without actually naming them. For these reasons, it is not surprising that powerful interests exploited the belief in “birther nonsense” for media attention and political gain. (*jacob.affolter@uky.edu*)

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*Joel Best, University of Delaware, USA  
& Kathleen A. Bogle, LaSalle University, USA*

### **How People Evaluate Contemporary Legends: Online Discussions about Sex Bracelets and Rainbow Parties**

Reports of sex bracelets and rainbow parties—two new, shocking forms of sexual play involving children and early adolescents—began circulating around 2003. By this time, the Internet was well-established enough that there were numerous online comments about both stories at websites, on Facebook pages, and in blogs and discussion threads. Thus, we have a record of how hundreds of people—mostly ordinary individuals, rather than journalists or other professional commentators—responded to these reports. Such data offer a new resource for scholars of contemporary legend; prior to the Internet’s maturing, it was very difficult to get a sense of the range of ways people responded to legends. Many of the comments about sex bracelets and rainbow parties were informed by popular familiarity with the concept of an urban legend. Comments divided naturally into those by believers who argued that the stories were not urban legends, but rather plausible, credible, or factual reports, and those by skeptics who insisted that the reports were “just” urban legends, i.e., unlikely, implausible, and probably false. Although believers and skeptics held contrary views, their arguments reflected a shared underlying culture; that is, they called upon parallel forms of reasoning and evidence. Thus, both invoked firsthand and secondhand reports; both criticized how the mass media covered the topic; both linked concern to changes occurring in the larger society; both focused on the nature of adult fears; and so on. For the most part, the same sorts of arguments appeared in debates over both sex bracelets and rainbow parties. An analysis of these comments shifts the traditional focus of analysis from the contents of contemporary legends, to the ways people respond to these stories, make sense of them, and assess their meaning. (*joelbest@udel.edu*)

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*Ian Brodie, Cape Breton University, Canada*

### **Generations and the Perception of Time in Legend and Custom**

In a paper presented at the 2004 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, I discussed a narrative circulating among Memorial University of Newfoundland graduate students that was framed as something akin to legend by the students themselves but as something closer to gossip (and slanderous

gossip at that) among faculty. I suggested that the span of time elapsed since the narrated events was fixed but that the perception of that time lapse was different if one measured by “generations”: for faculty the protagonist was recently departed whereas for students he was a figure from a distant past. My subsequent professional shift from student to faculty member and my recent work on a local material culture custom and performance have together only affirmed that the “generation” – a contextual and emic unit of measurement – is a fruitful unit for analyzing the lifespan and perception of traditional activities (including the very question of ‘tradition’), particular those activities simultaneously experienced by two complementary but distinct groups: child/adult; student/faculty; worker/management, and so on. Contemporary legend, the scholarship of which found so much material within adolescent and post-adolescent communities in its earliest forms, illustrates this phenomenon well, but by reintroducing the concept of generation back into the scholarship assumptions such as emergence and even, perhaps, contemporariness of legend can be better qualified.

(*ian\_brodie@cbu.ca*)

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*Daniel Compora, University of Toledo, USA*

### **Michigan Mutations**

Michigan is home to a number of hybridized, humanoid creatures. In the southeastern corner of the Great Lakes State, Monroe, Michigan is home to a very unique creature: the Dog Lady. This dog-like woman is said to inhabit a small island just off Lake Erie. This island is affectionately referred to by locals as "Dog Lady Island," and legends of her attack on young teenagers date back to the 1960's. Dog Lady briefly shared company with the Monroe Monster, a Bigfoot-type creature spotted in 1965 on Mentel Road, near the Detroit Beach area. After making the national news, the Monroe Monster was proven to be a hoax when hair samples found at the scene of an attack were discovered to have come from a paintbrush.

Southeastern Michigan is not the only home to a hybridized creature. In the north east corner of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the Michigan Dog Man is rumored to roam the woods. Also determined to be a hoax, perpetrated by a deejay at a local radio station, the legend of the dog man has persisted, and even has been recorded as a song.

Returning to, southern Monroe County, a family afflicted with the disease hydrocephalus allegedly

resided at one time in the small rural community of Whiteford. Inappropriately but alliteratively referred to as "The Waterheads of Whiteford, searches for this home has proven fruitless, but rumors of it still exist.

It is impossible to ignore the pattern of hybridized creatures occupying Michigan, particularly in Monroe County. Ironically, Monroe is notable for an entity powerfully linked to mutations: the Enrico Fermi II Nuclear Power Plant. Monroe is also home to that factory's predecessor, the Fermi I Power plant which suffered a partial meltdown in 1966, suggesting that Michigan's mutation legends may be an outgrowth of anxiety due to the presence of the nuclear power plant.

*(Daniel.Compora@utoledo.edu)*

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*Gail de Vos, University of Alberta, Canada*

### **Apps-olutely Folklore: Applications for the I-Generation**

"There's an App for that!" has become a very commonplace saying in the last few years. My question about the frequency and accessibility of apps enveloping contemporary folklore for the use of adults and teens brought forth a myriad of examples in a wide variety of categories. This presentation will survey the folklore inspired and folklore inclusive apps found on iTunes under their broader categories of games, entertainment, utilities, books, and reference. I will not, however, be considering the huge quantity of folkloric interactive books for any age or apps intended for use by young children.

Because of the mercurial and vigorous growth of these types of apps, this will be a preliminary appraisal of the types of apps involving folklore, the way these apps are being utilized, and their future potential for embracing contemporary folklore in popular culture.

The numerous variants of the Internet sensation, Slenderman, will be a major focus of the presentation with almost 50 different apps of various prices and classifications available for the iPad at this point in time. Apps that have the appellation of urban legends or well-known contemporary legends such as "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," "The Legend of Bloody Mary," and "The Scary Mirror" will also be examined as will several of the Haunted History or Haunted Hike sites, particular those for St. Johns' Newfoundland and New Orleans. The numerous apps to aid ghost hunters and to aid people in debunking a wide variety of contemporary legends will also be an integral element of the presentation.

Additionally, the ways these apps are being received and utilised by users will be assessed. Many of the apps

under discussion allow users to incorporate themselves into the folklore itself. Slenderman and the vanishing hitchhiker, for example, can easily be integrated into personal photographs. *(gail.devos@gmail.com)*

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*Gregory Hansen, Arkansas State University, USA*

### **Legends of Violence in Florida's History:**

#### **Encountering the Legacy of Cracker Violence**

The image of the Florida "cracker" is ambivalent. It often is seen as an epithet that denotes a sordid history of ignorance, racism, and violence. On the other hand, the image has been reformulated through a recent "Florida Cracker Renaissance." This presentation examines how the image of a "Florida cracker" has been formed throughout the past centuries and how folklorists encounter the complexities of the image in fieldwork with a native Floridian. The presenter will assert that understanding the complexities in this tension is enriched by looking at legends about racial violence. The focus is on ways that a contemporary storyteller relates the history through legends and personal experience narratives. His telling of legends about debt peonage and convict labor leasing emerge as plausible accounts of local history. They also suggest that the legends don't necessarily exaggerate history's harsh realities.

Major components of the meaning of "cracker" cluster around the state's legacy of violence. The "Florida Cracker" frequently was portrayed in highly negative terms in the Reconstruction Era in the late 19th century. Writers such as George Barbour described crackers as "simply white savages" who fight at a moment's notice, feast on clay, and heavily imbibe moonshine. Other writers, such as Carl Dann, take a more benign approach, but 20th century writing often portrays the Florida cracker in stereotypical terms. Even in contemporary writing, the Florida cracker is portrayed through stereotypes that link regional identity to violence and racism.

What do Florida natives think about this history? How do their legends and other narratives about violence connect to the received history that dominates perceptions about cracker culture? This paper explores how this history of negative images is connected to the current interest in reclaiming cracker culture in Florida. Referencing contemporary writing on Florida by folklorists such as Peggy Bulger, Gregory Hansen, Martha Nelson, Stetson Kennedy, and Jerrilyn McGregory, the presenter will look at the history of

violence to explore how this history is present in narratives from a Florida storyteller.

(*ghansen@astate.edu*)

*Elissa R. Henken, University of Georgia, USA*

### **The Price of Fame**

In the celebrity-mad culture of the United States, certain rumors and legends explain the rise and, sometimes, fall of quite a few popular music stars. One set of these reports appears to be a variant of “The Devil at the Crossroads,” in which a fiddler or guitarist sells his soul for skill and fame. In the newer form, the Illuminati—understood in this context as a secret society engaged in conspiracy to control world affairs and create the New World Order—performs the role of the devil and, instead of one outstanding musician, many performers have been drawn into their web. Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Kanye West, Lil Wayne, Rhianna, Eminem, and Lady Gaga are all said to have joined the Illuminati, and the signs are to be found in their gestures, their lyrics, and their clothing. In addition to explaining the source of riches and fame, stories also report the price demanded and, in some cases, the penalty for attempting to leave the organization.

These stories are shared both orally and through electronic social media, and even an oral performance may include reference to social media sources, either citing it or actually pulling it up on an electronic device. The statement, “it was in X’s blog/ on twitter/ in Wired” serves not just as pseudo-proof but also as direction to go look for oneself—to see for oneself the catalog of images and hear the lyrics that make the case against the performer. This paper examines the characteristics which make the performers vulnerable to suspicion, the interplay of oral and electronic texts, and the audience intrigued by this material. (*ehenken@uga.edu*)

*Clint Jones, University of Kentucky, USA*

### **“The Downfall of Camelot: Mimetic Violence and Le Morte d’Arthur”**

My paper utilizes contemporary scholarship on theories of mimesis, specifically the theories of Rene Girard, to offer a unique interpretation of the Legend of King Arthur. By applying a theory of mimesis to the most endearing relationships of the Arthurian Legend—Arthur and Guinevere, Arthur and Morgan le Fay, Guinevere and Lancelot to name only a few—I argue that mimetic violence is responsible for the downfall of Camelot. The theory of mimetic violence argues that

when two individuals come to desire the same thing for the same reasons they will eventually become rivals that cannot help but destroy themselves—that is, they must be consumed by the violence their rivalry engenders. I argue that Arthur’s realm is stricken at every turn by mimetic entanglements and that, ultimately, the fate of Camelot was unavoidable precisely because of the mimetic relationships upon which it was built and the self-consuming violence they wrought. My arguments about Camelot are then extrapolated to a general theory about the reasons for violence in our modern cultural milieu and how we might begin to understand the problem of violence inherent in contemporary society. (*c.w.jones@uky.edu*)

*Andrea Kitta, East Carolina University, USA*

### **The HPV Vaccine: Protecting “Sluts”, “Gays”, and “Stupid People” since 2006**

Since its initial introduction in 2006, the HPV vaccine has been the subject of controversy. Religious groups have spoken out against the vaccine, indicating that it will increase promiscuity in pre-teen and teenage girls. This public outcry led to a landmark medical study which attempted to prove that sexual activity and the vaccine are not linked (Bednarczyk et al. 2012). The HPV vaccine has also been linked to a number of injuries and deaths, most famously the case of Gabby Swank, the subject of a popular YouTube video, and Michelle Bachman’s claim that the vaccine causes “mental retardation”. While proponents have supported the efficacy and safety of the vaccine, they have also criticized the advertising campaigns utilized by the companies, in particular Gardasil’s “Because I’m smart” campaign, and the recommended ages for vaccination. There has also been a great deal of confusion surrounding males receiving the vaccine, which have led to rumors that the vaccine targets boys who are presumed to be homosexual. Imbedded in all of these legends is the presupposition that this vaccine is linked to moral values and intelligence. (*kittaa@ecu.edu*)

### **Mikel J. Koven, University of Worcester, United Kingdom Found-Footage Films and the Visual Rhetoric of the Legend Film**

In a recent article by Elliott Oring published in *Journal of American Folklore*, Oring calls for a rhetorical study of the legend form; that is, he explores how legend storytellers avail themselves to a number of rhetorical devices in order to persuade the listeners of

the veracity of their account. Regardless of the essentialist (and hypothetical) assumptions about legend storytellers, Oring's article suggests a model for the study of 'the legend film'. Instead of seeing popular films as being 'based on' a legend (an issue of adaptation), a rhetorical study of the legend film, suggests the filmmaker avails themselves to a variety of visual devices which underline the film's own truth claims. In other words, what does the filmmaker do in order to persuade us of the truthfulness of their film?

The 'Found-Footage' film refers to a narrative & stylistic device which suggests that the fiction film we are watching is made up of footage happened upon. If any editing to the footage has been done, so the films' backstories contend, it is only in linking up a variety of film sections for narrative continuity. While *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick & Sanchez, 1999) is probably the most famous of these films, a number of contemporary horror films (and franchises) likewise avail themselves to this style of filmmaking. For example, the Paranormal Activity films (several directors, 2007-2012) about ghosts and witches, *The Devil Within* (William Brent Bell, 2012) about demonic possession and *The Fourth Kind* (Olatunde Osunsanmi, 2009) about alien abductions fall within this category.

This current paper examines these films for their rhetorical construction of how they attempt to persuade the viewer of the veracity of their narratives. Like legends, according to Oring, these films try to persuade us of their truthfulness.

(*m.koven@worc.ac.uk*)

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*Ambrož Kvartič, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*  
**Legends ARE False: Popular Pseudo-Scientific  
 Search for Truth Behind Legends**

Studying contemporary legends and their bearers, one can observe a various ostensive practices of active engagement in search for truth/reality behind narratives' statements, events and characters. These practices are based on an idea of need (even necessity) for unambiguous validation of legend's truth or falseness. People perform them by different means of challenging legends' content and stating judgment about its veracity. For this purpose, these practices have started utilizing scientific methods such as experiments or participation-observation – especially in recent decades with arrival of the internet. Consequently they are very often perceived and presented as being strictly scientific, although in reality, despite using some scientific modes of observation, they lean primarily

upon speculative, mystic, or even plain out invented (imagined).

It seems that today the necessity of (scientific) determination of legends' veracity is a direct result of two major social and cultural (ideological) discourses. The first one is journalistic discourse, defined by fast-thinking production of »truth«, driven by anti-intellectualistic models of reality-creation, and marked by a never-ending search for extraordinary and spectacular. With mass consumption of its products this discourse not only helps with legends' distribution but also facilitates its own mode of dealing with (dis)belief. The second one is a scientific paradigm of (logical) positivism, stating that all (scientific) knowledge must be validated by modes of observation. During the past several decades positivism rooted itself in the pseudo-scientific realms of internet and popular culture. This is evident with widely consumed legend-debunking products and with presence of debunking groups on the internet that create their own (in)validating mechanisms with the sole purpose of determining legends' veracity. (*ambroz.kvartic@gmail.com*)

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*John Laudun, University of Louisiana, USA*  
**Locating Louisiana Legends at the Intersection(s) of  
 Land and Water**

Two recent collections of Louisiana folk narrative, Ancelet's "Cajun and Creole Folktales" and Lindahl, Owens, and Harvison's "Swapping Stories," reveal an interesting trend in Louisiana legendry: that supernatural occurrences, often tied to potential economic windfalls, are often located at the edges of lakes, in marshes, or other places where land and water intersect. While the national imaginary of southern Louisiana might hold that such intersections are unavoidable, there are plenty of other forms and topics where the interplay of land and water are not so prominent.

This paper attempts to map out, if the pun may be allowed, the relationships between the two that run through a number of legends drawn from both published collections as well as those documented by the author himself over the course of ten years of fieldwork in south Louisiana. The goal of this study is both to determine if there are any stable topologies that are present in the corpus as well as to essay if there is any necessary relationship between this particular pair, and their relationship, and the legend as a form itself -- that is, if land and water figures in other forms, does it figure differently enough that one can

confidently predict that if the figure of land and water appear in one such fashion that it is most likely legend and in another fashion then something else? The corpus here is not large, and one of the things the paper seeks to elicit from a larger conversation with legend scholars is how much one can draw from a particular set of materials. *(jlaudun@me.com)*

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*Carl Lindahl, University of Houston, USA*

### **Swift's Yahoo = Boone's Yeahoh = Bigfoot?**

Less than 25 miles southeast of Lexington, Kentucky runs Lulbegrud Creek, named after a fictional city in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The creek was christened in 1770 by a party of four hunters, including Daniel Boone, who had carried Swift's book into place where few, if any, printed fantasies had ever preceded it. They had made up a story that transformed the surrounding wilderness into the Swift's imaginary world, and the creek's name bears witness to how palpably they imposed their imagination upon the land.

Forty-nine years later, according to one account, Daniel Boone was still telling Swiftian tales: on a visit to Limestone, Kentucky in 1817, he told his innkeeper's son a story of killing a ten-foot tall "giant" covered with hair. Frontier historians have identified this creature as a "yahoo," assuming that this creature is derived from the hairy monsters of *Gulliver's Travels*.

A creature known as a "yeahoh" inhabits Kentucky oral traditions recorded in the 1940s and 50s by Alan Lomax and Leonard Roberts. Sometimes "yahoe" seems to stand for any sort of fantasy animal, but most often it refers to a terrifying, nocturnal, Bigfoot-like animal.

This paper draws upon audio-recorded Kentucky yeahoh tales in an attempt to assess the relationship between the twentieth-century oral traditions and the body of clues (some concocted by historians) connecting Daniel Boone to Jonathan Swift and Swift's yahoos. For all the claims of equivalence among the three beasts, Swift's "yahoos", the "giant" killed by Daniel Boone, and the "yeahohs" recorded from mountain narrators in the twentieth century do not easily fit one mold. *(lindahlcarl1@gmail.com)*

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*Kristin McAndrews, University of Hawaii, USA*

### **Cultural Gastronomy and the Contemporary**

#### **Legend: The Beauty and the Beast**

Throughout her extensive body of work, contemporary French artist Françoise Pérovitch delves into a myriad of artistic and literary forms often

juxtaposing incongruous images in order to create a dialogue between the artwork and the audience. Storytelling, fairytales and the contemporary legend inform her work as does biography and autobiography. In an exhibition at the Museum of Hunting and Nature in Paris in 2011-2012, her work created a self-conscious and dynamic dialogue with the original intentions of the museum, while inverting a traditional narrative of hunting and nature. Like the curiosity collection at the museum, Pérovitch challenges an audience to consider the disjunction between art and nature, humans and animals and self and other, becoming a sort of a gastronomical diplomat, mediating between the hunter and the hunted.

In this presentation, I will discuss one of Pérovitch's seventeen artistic exhibits at the Museum of Hunting and Nature, focusing on storytelling in relationship to tradition, inversion and intertextuality. Entitled "L'art d'accommoder le giber" or The Art of Preserving the Game, Pérovitch set a dozen exquisitely etched and embossed paper plates within the Cabinet de Poreclaine that reflect the complex role of the other. The black and white etchings appeal to the extraordinary, the bizarre and the grotesque, questioning the temporality of narratives that follow culture, especially on the nature of animals and humans in relationship to hunting.

I will discuss one specific plate from this display that depicts two famous hunters and cultural legends: Annie Oakley, a 19th century American sharpshooter, and La Bête du Gévaudan, a reportedly real wolf-like monster who hunted humans in 18th century France, killing 100 people in southwestern France during a three year period. The legend of La Bête continues to inform popular culture, making an appearance in the French countryside as recently as 2011. The plate reflects issues of gender, the contemporary legend, biography, the fairytale "Beauty and the Beast" and the politics of national identity. *(mcandrew@hawaii.edu)*

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*Jodi McDavid, Cape Breton University, Canada*

### **The Monsignor "was a Very Scary Man": Personal Experience Narratives from Acadian-New Brunswick**

Personal experience narratives are an unusual form for published priest narratives, doubly so because personal experience narratives are a somewhat emergent area of study in folklore (starting with Stahl 1977). My mother's narratives explicitly outline familial conflicts with the church; personal issues with



patriarchy and power, and the spiritual void which she continues to attempt to fill as a response to leaving the Catholic Church (cf. Primiano 1985). Her counterclerical narratives seem to be a counter-hegemonic discourse on the nature of power in general, rather than a comment on clerical power in specific. Her history includes thirty years of abuse perpetuated by the Church, her father, her brother, and her first husband. But it is easiest to talk about the priests. These clerical narratives of victimization continue to change, have a more varied audience, and sometimes even become narratives of empowerment.

Using feminist approaches, I explore the way in which her narratives skirt and merge the genres of oral history, memorate, legendry, and historical legend. Lawless promotes a “gendered-overreading,” of women’s narratives, addressing those things which may be deemphasized or unsaid (1991:49-50). Using this approach, I connect the evolution of her narratives and their audiences to her life history and address their influence on each other, suggesting why the narratives both reflect back and look forward at the same time. I also provide an autoethnographic approach to the topic at hand, looking at my experience of religion as influenced by the experiences of my mother.

(*jodi\_mcdavid@cbu.ca*)

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*Yvonne J. Milspaw*

*Harrisburg Area Community College, USA*

### **Powwowing, Witchcraft, and Conflicting Systems of Authority in Pennsylvania German Legends**

Powwowing, or Braucher, is a venerable Central European system of healing illnesses caused by Hexerei, witchcraft. It is a central belief in the legend repertoire of Pennsylvania German communities until very recently. The stories (and I will be drawing from a large collection of them) are presented as propositions about the truth were intertwined narratives of explanations, evidence and speculation for the reality of the narrated events. Illness and bad luck were “caused” by other community members who “had the power for that sort of thing” and who were motivated by malice or vindictiveness against their neighbors. The legend address questions of health and fortune which could only be answered ambiguously by elite “authorities”—pastors, physicians, teachers—and permitted local community tradition to resolve the ambiguities. Witchcraft narratives and stories of the healers formed an alternative (and conflicting) system of authority that vouched for the realness of tradition, and permitted the

undereducated, dialect speaking, rural poor a strong voice counter to the dominant, educated English speaking power elite.

Using collected texts as a base, this paper will consider stories about witchcraft and healing as negotiations on status, ethnicity, and authority.

(*yjmilspa@hacc.edu*)

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*Daniel Peretti, Indiana University, USA*

### **The Bunk of Debunkers: Ostensive Action and Ambiguity in Stage Magic**

This paper explores the relationship between the role of debunker and the fraud being exposed. I will start with the legend that circulates within the circles of stage magicians called the Indian Rope trick. During a tour of India, magicians Penn and Teller attempted to find someone to perform this trick. The trick consists of a magician raising a rope into the air, followed by a boy who climbs the rope and disappears. The boy’s body parts fall to the ground, to be reassembled by the magician. The duo, unable to find anyone who can perform the trick, develops a ruse in which they apparently perform the trick themselves, and they invite an American couple to witness it. But the couple arrives late, seeing only the aftermath. It’s nothing more than an attempt by the magicians to start a rumor that they have been able to do the trick. The paper will examine the ostensive nature of the magicians’ performance while looking at the idea that ambiguity is the fuel for stage magic and the rhetoric of its accompanying patter. Penn and Teller provide a good case for this study, not only because of their reputation for revealing the secrets of their tricks, but because they have set themselves up as the heirs of Harry Houdini in debunking of fraudulent claims of supernatural powers. Looking at these events through the lens of the concept of ostension, this essay sees them as evidence of a growing notion that we explore the nature of the things that fascinate us to find enchantment in them while also proving our mastery over them by seeing the truth behind them.

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### **The Prankster, the Kobolds, and the Helpful Giant: Some Aspects of Camp Culture at a Southern Indiana Girl Scout Camp**

Girl Scout Camp Henry F. Koch (pronounced cook), in Southern Indiana, was a refuge in the 1960’s, when

rapid social changes burdened adolescent campers and their college-student counselors with confusing demands. Fear came from the outer margins of the camp, however, in the form of mysterious noise-makers and night-time malicious spirits.

Reassurance came, oddly enough, from a song, "Magalena Hagalena," about a surpassingly ugly giant girl. Counselors hated the song, but taught it to the younger campers anyhow. Informants, who do not – with one exception – remember liking the song, say it was something younger campers needed, campers aged 8 to 12. They have no idea why or how the song helped them.

Pranks at the camp, never spiteful, could be subtle and even artistic; the tale included here describes a prank targeting the camp director; the most creative pranksters at the camp were counselors, rather than campers.

The proposed talk will compare the prankster tale, the song, and several fragmentary accounts of the dreaded trompy-tromps, who manifest as kobolds might, or perhaps the Wild Hunt. The camp's world view frames the narratives.

Informants are members of two interlocking friendship groups; one took shape at the camp 1958-1970 and remains in existence today. The other group formed more recently but originated in camp alumnae ties. All the informants have achieved marked success in their adult lives; all give credit for their successes to their experiences at the camp.

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**Ghosts Moving Furniture**

A few years ago I presented a paper called "Marbles on the Ceiling," which analyzed the meaning of marbles making a sudden sound above the listener in college students' ghost stories. This paper similarly explores the significance of an abrupt, startling, and unpleasant sound: the screeching groan of furniture moving across a floor, pushed by spectral hands. Like the sound of falling marbles, the sound of moving furniture has intriguing layers of meaning. Many college narrators describe spooky experiences during Resident Assistant training, before students arrive to begin their academic year. These stories signify the next stage of college life: a year of challenges and rewards that have not yet become clear. It is significant that student narrators usually describe sounds of moving furniture becoming audible over their heads, suggesting both thoughts

about the coming year and concerns about the possibility of becoming overwhelmed by a demanding schedule.

Stories about ghosts moving furniture in private homes do not signal the same concerns that college students' stories emphasize, although they similarly highlight sudden, unpleasant realization. These stories tend to move backward in time, bringing up disturbing past events. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock notes that "ghosts are unstable interstitial figures that problematize dichotomous thinking" (4). I will examine a story about furniture-moving ghosts that dramatically connects disturbing sounds with troubling memories of slaves incarcerated by their owner. In this story the sounds of screeching, groaning furniture insist upon being heard, reminding listeners of complex and unresolved conflicts. *(Itucker@binghamton.edu)*

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**How Many "Birthers" Does It Take To Screw In A Light Bulb?: Obama Contemporary Legends and the 2012 Reelection**

President Barack Hussein Obama, more so than any president, has been the subject of contemporary legends and rumors. Prior to his 2008 election, the most frequently disseminated texts claimed that he was not a Christian as he claimed but rather a practicing Muslim. Following his first inauguration in 2009, the emphasis shifted to claims that he is not a citizen of the United States and therefore not constitutionally entitled to serve as its President.

Throughout his first administration, the birther texts persisted, at times getting more attention than others. Realtor and reality television star Donald Trump surfaced as an ardent proponent of the view that the President had failed to authenticate his citizenship.

This paper will document the changes in the birther cycle that appeared as the 2012 presidential campaign was launched. Questions to be addressed include: In what ways were birther texts that surfaced around his first campaign different than those that accompanied his reelection bid? The paper's themes will include the comedic texts that began to proliferate as professional comedians and political pundits began to make "birthers" the butt of jokes. It will also address the ways in which some media outlets as well as representatives of the Obama campaign began to use the language familiar to ISCLR members, "urban legend," "myth," "conspiracy theory," "tall tale," to discredit the cycle

and its advocates. It will explore the supposition that the Obama team was able to turn what was perceived to be a liability into a campaign asset.

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### **DSK and the Conspiracy Theory**

In the NTIC era, the media has proven to be the diffusion channel and the informer of all sorts of conflicts. The media also creates the place for the conflict expression. This place incubates, develops and can even disintegrate the judgment communities which themselves defend their vision, their world and society beliefs in several fields. It is the case in the political field, where conspiracy theory believers will confront their skeptics and politicians at official speeches.

Considering that:

- Beliefs are constructed by interaction with the environment, by interpersonal discussion or interaction with others, or even a mix of this elements;
- Beliefs are not always radical and they can evolve, be qualified or be reinforced by discussions or conflicts;
- Beliefs are an identifying factor and their sharing & defense have a socializing effect;
- Conflicts inject dynamism into strategic, tactical and organizational competences of the people defending their beliefs;

the paper will present content analysis results of fifty conflicting discussions on conspiracy theories involving Dominique Strauss-Kahn since May 2011. These discussions are randomly collected on websites, chats, forums and social networks. They reveal opposite or complementary beliefs by the judgment communities on these conspiracy theories. They reveal also the evolution of these theories. The content analysis allows the finding of indications on cognitive, identity and social strategies developed by the judgment communities in order to construct, adhere, reinforce, share, promote or defend their beliefs in these theories.

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### **They Always Lie to Strangers: Turning the Tables in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House***

At one point in Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* the character of Dr. John

Montague, a professor of anthropology, offers the other three main characters—his assistants—the fruits of his own investigation into the eighty-year history of New England's Hill House. Although Montague takes pride in his having begun to investigate the paranormal by means of as scientific a method as possible, he does not see—as Jackson expects the astute reader of her novel otherwise to see—that his chronicle of Hill House contains many an element of the “whitewash,” something to which, as a professed anthropologist, he ought to have been more sensitive. For Montague's narrative betrays evidence of variations in verbal testimony—if not of outright lies—derived from his principal source, the locals of the nearby village of Hill House. By depending uncritically thereon and by refusing to check such testimony against material evidence to which he has already been privy—not to mention physical evidence he will later uncover in Hill House—the would-be empiricist Montague shows himself, in effect (if indeed not in intention), to have “had” by the votaries of Hill House. The importance with which the professor regards himself, bolstered by his own naïve chronicle, suggests the Hill House locals, having seen through his self-regard and consequent obtuseness, had intended all along to feed him both false and ambiguous information in order to conceal the more unseemly features of the history of Hill House and, therewith, to enjoy a private joke at his expense. Here, then, Jackson satisfies one of the aims of the inclusion of folklore in literature, viz. to deploy folklore—in this case, the stitching of a narrative out of a patchwork of confused, and confusing, local testimony—as a means of indexing a common sociological phenomenon. The phenomenon is one of suspicion by “the folk” (as 1950s folklorists would have called the Hill House townies) of pointy-headed academics and other self-regarding intruders. (That, incidentally, the tables are surreptitiously turned on the academic Montague within the halls of liminal Hill House suggests cultural anthropologist Victor Turner's later inventory of the types of setting, or tableaux, appropriate to the phenomenon of Anti-Structure.)

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### **Building a Legend: The “Skinny” on the Slenderman**

In June 2009, a user of a popular online forum created a thread in which other users were asked to manipulate photos in order to create their own paranormal images. In the eight months the thread was

active, it amassed nearly 2,000 posts, many of which featured a mysterious, malevolent figure dubbed 'the Slender Man.' Today, 'Slenderlore' can be found across the internet in the form of personal blog and video entries, wiki-based 'encyclopedias,' a dedicated online community of over 1,000 members, and, recently, a free downloadable video game. Slender-lore certainly has the audience and feel of a contemporary legend, but can we fully consider it one?

Slender-lore meets many of the usual criteria for determining status as legend: it is widely known amongst a group of people, it embodies cultural anxieties, and it is often presented as true. Problematically, however, it does not meet others: the lore has no clear narrative structure, and the Slender Man figure is so amorphous that there is some argument as to what exactly it is. Most importantly, Slender-lore has an unmistakable origin, and this information is so readily available that suspension of disbelief—usually a prerequisite for legendry—is practically impossible.

Richard Dorson's "folklore/fakelore" distinction is sometimes used to differentiate between authentic folk material and that which has been created deliberately, often for monetary or ideological purposes. Slender-lore shares some features with fakelore, most notably in its creation and mass dissemination.

However, fakelore is also marked by a standardized form and a lack of imagination. The active participation of forum members in creating Slender-lore negates these, demonstrating that while the lore may not be 'proper' legend, nor is it 'proper' fakelore. The increasing prevalence of Slender-lore and other online 'pseudo-legends' reveal that this distinction is no longer relevant.

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Given our narrator's assurance at the time of the telling that this gruesome story had been around for at least a few decades, we undertook looking for 19<sup>th</sup>-century forms of the legend, particularly those set in New York. Not only did we find them, but we also stumbled upon similar, true-life (and death) occurrences within the pages of *The New York Times*.

The earliest American version of "The Man in the Middle" we found, Miriam Coles Harris's "A Christmas Eve Experience," appeared in the 19 December 1883 issue (p. 1) of the New York weekly *Swinton's Story-Teller*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Harris's telling, set in New York, is quite long. One would think that a story involving the discovery of the dead man on a stage (a horse-drawn conveyance carrying multiple passengers) would be enough; instead the trip on the stage and the discovery of the dead man serve as a means to study how the principal characters are affected by the harrowing experience. Here, we merely summarize Harris's take on "The Man in the Middle."

It is Christmas Eve night. Looking for a diversion before the holiday, siblings Tom and Ellen and their cousin Elizabeth decide to take a trip on the stage to Broadway and back. In due course, the stage, quite empty, arrives at the corner stop and the young people embark on their excursion. The stage travels down the snowy streets and Ellen watches passersby as they bustle along the sidewalks with last-minute errands for the holiday. Soon, the driver stops for a group of four men, three of whom struggle to carry onto the stage an incapacitated comrade (Ellen speculates he is ill or disabled), which annoys the driver, who—after the newcomers are on board—impatiently signals for the horses to start. A few moments into the trip the driver has to stop suddenly, which causes the man being supported to be thrown violently back onto a seat. Two of his companions settle on either side of him; the other sits across. Ellen observes that the sick man is so bundled up that she cannot tell anything about him. Her attention shifts to his associates, who soon become aware that they are under some scrutiny. As the stage makes its way through the city, Ellen notes that the companions gradually depart, one by one, each time bidding farewell to those who remain. Finally, the incapacitated man is alone. Elizabeth implores Tom to check on the poor man; after he does so, he urges Ellen and his cousin to get off the stage with him. They descend into the snowy city. Tom finally tells Ellen and Elizabeth that the man was "stone dead," with "a wound over his temple big enough to have killed forty men."

## ARTICLE

### THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY "MAN IN THE MIDDLE"

Thirty or forty years ago, long before skyscrapers and rapid transit were thought of, and New York was just a great big growing town, they used to tell a story that was ghastly enough to curdle the blood of the most sceptical and to keep people of nervous temperament awake of nights.

Thus began the telling of "A Tale Once Told," a version of "The Man in the Middle" that appeared in the January, 1904 issue of *The Bookman* (see Bennett and Smith 2007 for a link to the complete version).

The discovery of a corpse on a stage had, in fact, featured in at least one earlier short work of fiction: Fortuné Du Boisgobey's "Le crime de l'omnibus" ("The Crime on the Omnibus," or "An Omnibus Mystery"), published in 1881 (and translated into English in 1882), involves the murder on an omnibus of a young woman, the discovery of her body, and the ensuing investigation and capture of her murderers (Du Boisgobey 1885). Further, the core of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, the 1886 novel by New Zealander Fergus Hume, features a murder in a hansom cab and the discovery of the dead man by the cab driver. That the theme of "the corpse on the conveyance" appeared on three continents in the 1880s suggests that it may not have been new; perhaps it had real-life predecessors of some sort.

"The Man in the Middle" of late 19<sup>th</sup> century New York likely reflected the concerns harbored by New Yorkers about safety in the burgeoning metropolis. As well, two murders committed in the city in the 1890s may have contributed to the popularity of legend there; both featured an attempt to conceal a murder and the movement of the dead via public or hired transport. In April, 1895, a gruesome crime (*New York Times* 1895), which involved the murderer's carrying a parcel containing the dismembered remains of his victim on a Sixth Avenue streetcar,<sup>2</sup> caused *The Waterbury [Connecticut] American* to remind its readers of the legend of the dead man on the stage.

A good many readers of the American may have learned or read an interesting story of the pre-horse car days, when lines of 'buses were the principal means of transportation between lower and upper New York. The story is illustrative of a well authenticated event in New York's current history.

One evening a gentleman and his wife, after leaving the theater, got into a 'bus to go home. There were in the 'bus besides themselves only a part of three, a drunken man and two companions, who were caring for him. This drunken man was very drunk. Every time the 'bus bumped he lurched, and it took all his companions' care to keep him straight on his seat. Finally, Forty-second street was reached. One of the drunken man's companions pulled the strap and stopped the 'bus. They bolstered the drunken man up in a corner and told him to "brace up" and to remember to get out when the 'bus reached the end of the line, assuring him that his home was "only just around the corner," and that he could get there without trouble. To

all of this the drunken man returned only a stupid stare. The 'bus started on, and at the first lurch the drunken man fell prone upon the floor. The gentleman, moved by pity, got up and went over to him, to help him back upon his seat. Having accomplished this he pulled the strap and motioned to his wife to get out, although they were some blocks from their destination. When they had alighted the gentleman asked his wife what she thought was the matter with the man. She said: "Very drunk, I suppose." "No," he replied, "that man's throat had been cut from ear to ear."

It is asserted that this is a true story; that murderers took this unusual and daring way of disposing of their victim's body, and that the murder was ever afterwards a mystery, no clew ever tracking it to the murderers. Many persons regard the tale as entirely improbable. They do not believe that any man could take a corpse in a 'bus in such a fashion undetected. Yet New York to-day parallels that case. In the early evening the negro murderer, Ceasar, takes a bundle containing the mutilated remains of his victim on the front platform of a Sixth avenue horse car and drops it over an area railing by mistake, without arousing a single suspicion in the mind of any one composing the big crowd that is constantly jostling him.

Some may claim that the presence of the crowd was his safety, and that later in the evening, the time of the story above told, he would have been in great danger of detection. This may or may not be so. The only purpose here is to call attention to the fact so often illustrated, that what pass for the improbabilities of fiction are often curiously paralleled in the actual experiences of real life.<sup>3</sup>

Just four years later, in December, 1899, Ferdinand Baer, a barroom owner in Long Island City (Queens), shot and killed a patron (the injury caused instant death), and enlisted the aid of two confederates "to convey the body to Manhattan in a hired cab." As *The New York Times* described it at the time:

Their ostensible purpose was to take [the deceased] to Bellevue Hospital for medical attention, but the police believe their real intent was to drop the body on some street in this borough in the endeavor to mislead the authorities. It was while waiting for a Thirty-fourth Street ferryboat on the Long Island side [of

the East River] that the cabman, Charles McDermitt, who had been engaged by Baer in front of the Murray Hill Lyceum to take “a sick friend” to Bellevue, discovered that the “sick friend” in his cab was a corpse. He immediately notified Patrolman Graham, who was on duty at the ferry entrance, and the three men and McDermitt, with the corpse, were taken to the Seventy-fifth Precinct Police Station. (8)

By 1904, *The Bookman* had informed its readers that the story of the dead man on the stage “probably never happened,” adding that “those who told it were careful to enhance its horror by assuring their hearers that it was an absolute, if inexplicable, occurrence.” One can only hope that by 1904 occurrences involving carrying body parts on Sixth Avenue omnibuses or transporting corpses through Queens in hired cabs were nonexistent or at least underreported.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The same story appeared without attribution as “In a London Omnibus” in the December 1906 issue (p. 1013) of *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal* (Cleveland, Ohio), which suggests Harris’s story saw considerable circulation in the decades since its publication in 1883.
- <sup>2</sup> William Caesar had, in a jealous rage, killed a woman in his rooms at 148 W. 27th Street, chopped her up with a borrowed cleaver, wrapped her remains in a makeshift parcel on the following evening (a Saturday), and – carrying the ghastly package – caught a Sixth Avenue streetcar headed south, towards downtown. In his confession, Caesar said he had intended to dispose of the body in the river, but he discovered that the streetcar only went as far south as Waverly Place, at which point he got off with his bundle and carried it to the sidewalk. The package, however, slipped out of his grasp as he rested it on a railing and it fell to an area below, where “the covering became disarranged.” Caesar lost his nerve and left the scene. The parcel, with its contents, was discovered the next morning.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Waterbury American's* editorial was reprinted in several American newspapers in May, 1895. The *Dallas [Texas] Morning News*, for example, titled this “Safety in a Crowd; Some Considerations of the Ease with Which a Murderer May Avoid Detection” and printed it in its 12 May 1895 edition (12).

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## ISCLR ONLINE

For those unaware, ISCLR has a new website, at [www.contemporarylegend.org](http://www.contemporarylegend.org). We are trying to make this a more dynamic place, and are interested in your input. Any suggestions, contributions, or complaints can be directed to Ian Brodie at [ian\\_brodie@cbu.ca](mailto:ian_brodie@cbu.ca).

Our email list is a going concern: subscribe at [isclr@folklore.ee](mailto:isclr@folklore.ee).

We are also on Twitter: follow us @ISCLR

We also have a very active Facebook presence, having recently switched over from a “page” to a “group.” Visit [www.facebook.com/groups/ISCLR](http://www.facebook.com/groups/ISCLR) to join.

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A sneak peek will be available for perusal at Lexington.